



Waterlooville Leisure Centre

Ecological Scoping Survey Report

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1 Introduction

1.1 Site Description

The site is located off Waterberry Drive, in the south-western part of Waterlooville, in the county of Hampshire at approximate postcode PO7 7UW. The site, which is estimated to be around 1.8 hectares in size, is centred on Ordnance Survey grid reference SU 674 101 and contains the Leisure Centre, with associated access road/car parking, miscellaneous planting, grassland, scrub and scattered trees.

The land immediately surrounding the site contains residential properties to the north and commercial premises to the south, east and west. The wider surrounding area also contains agricultural fields, amenity grassland, parkland, woodland and water bodies.

The site and surrounding area are illustrated in aerial images provided in Appendix 1, the existing site plan is provided in Appendix 2 and photographs of the site are provided in Appendix 3.

1.2 Proposed Works

It is understood that the proposed works are the subject of a planning application to Havant Borough Council, the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and that they include the extension of the existing building and provision of additional car parking, as illustrated in Appendix 4.

1.3 Aims of Study

To inform a planning application, GreenLink Ecology Ltd. has been commissioned by PDP Architecture LLP. to conduct an ecological scoping survey of the site, to identify what habitats are present and look for any evidence of, or potential for, protected/notable species and their habitats.

The aim of this report is to present the results of the survey, describe the habitat characteristics of the site, highlight any areas of conservation concern and make recommendations for mitigation/enhancement measures required to avoid impacts to habitats and protected/notable species.

2 Methodology

An ecological scoping survey was undertaken on 5th December 2013 by experienced consultant ecologist Marcus Fry MCIEEM¹. The plant species and habitat types present were identified and any evidence of, or potential for, protected/notable species and their habitats was recorded. On the day of the survey, the weather conditions were overcast and the temperature at midday was around 9°C.

¹ Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (Full)

3 Results

3.1 Habitat Description

The site contains hard standing, miscellaneous planting, grassland, scrub and scattered trees.

The hard standing is present throughout the access road/car parking areas, adjacent to the Leisure Centre. This is an artificial habitat type of inherently low ecological value, which is therefore not considered further in this report.

The miscellaneous planting is located around the Leisure Centre and associated car park areas, predominantly comprising non-native ornamental species.

The amenity grassland is species-poor in composition, containing perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), creeping cinquefoil (*Potentilla reptans*), red clover (*Trifolium pratense*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and buttercup (*Ranunculus* sp.), along with cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*), false oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*), common ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*), St John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), dock (*Rumex* sp.) and common nettle (*Urtica dioica*) to the north and east of the Leisure Centre where the grassland is less intensively maintained.

The scrub vegetation is located along the margins of the tree-lined boundary with Hambledon Road and in several dense patches amongst the grassland to the north of the Leisure Centre. Species present include blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), bramble, common ivy (*Hedera helix*) and dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*).

There are trees scattered throughout the site, adjacent to the Leisure Centre, access road/car parking areas and grassland. The trees are of varying maturity and species, with ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), silver birch (*Betula pendula*), elder (*Sambucus nigra*), poplar (*Populus* sp.) and willow (*Salix* sp.), along with non-native species. The trees are most abundant along the boundary with Hambledon Road.

None of the plants recorded within the site are protected or notable species and the habitats present are not of conservation concern.

3.2 Protected/Notable Species

3.2.1 Bats

Since the proposed works will affect the existing Leisure Centre building, which could directly impact upon bats, if present, this was assessed by Natural England bat licence holder Marcus Fry MCIEEM (licence no. CLS01400), for any evidence of, or potential for bats. Features and evidence considered included:

- Roof and wall construction;
- Features that have the potential to be actual bat roosts or provide access to roosting opportunities within the building;
- Any droppings and/or staining on external walls;
- Scattered or accumulated bat droppings (identified by their dry, powdery texture when compressed) within the building or around entrances to potential roosts;
- Oily staining, scratch marks and/or urine staining around entrances to potential roosts;
- Places where cobwebs have been swept away; and
- The actual presence of live or dead bats.

In summary, the existing Leisure Centre building is constructed from a metal/concrete frame with brick/corrugated metal walls and a predominantly flat metal/perspex roof. No evidence of bats was recorded during the survey and no potentially suitable roost features were identified.

Since the proposed works may require the removal/disturbance of certain trees within the site, these were assessed and categorised 1*, 1, 2 or 3 in accordance with the 2012 Bat Conservation Trust's published guidance²:

- A category 1* tree has multiple, highly suitable features capable of supporting larger roosts.
- A category 1 tree has definite bat potential, supporting fewer suitable features than category 1* trees or with potential for use by single bats.
- A category 2 tree has no obvious potential, although the tree is of a size and age that elevated surveys may result in cracks or crevices being found, or the tree supports some features which may have limited potential to support bats.
- A category 3 tree has no potential to support bats.

In summary, all of the trees within the site were classified as being category 3, since they are either immature and/or do not appear to have any suitable features that could potentially be used by roosting bats. However, the trees do have the potential to be used by the local bat population for foraging/commuting purposes, in particular those adjacent to the Hambledon Road boundary

3.2.2 Breeding Birds

Although no evidence for breeding birds was recorded during the survey (conducted outside of the breeding season), the larger shrubs within the miscellaneous planting, along with the scrub and scattered trees, represent potentially suitable habitats for use by nesting birds during the breeding season (March-July/August, as a guide).

3.2.3 Reptiles

Although no evidence for reptiles was recorded during the survey (conducted whilst reptiles would be in hibernation), the potential for reptile presence was considered due to the grassland/scrub habitats within the site.

² Hundt L (2012) Bat Surveys: Good Practice Guidelines, Bat Conservation Trust (2nd Edition)

4 Assessment

4.1 Constraints

It was possible to access all relevant parts of the site and the survey was undertaken by an experienced consultant ecologist using standard survey techniques. It is therefore considered that there were no significant constraints to the ecological scoping survey.

4.2 Potential Impacts

4.2.1 Habitats

The habitats within the site are common/widespread and not of conservation concern. It is considered that the loss of these habitats is insignificant and can be offset through replacement planting post-construction.

4.2.2 Protected/Notable Species

4.2.2.1 Bats

Since there has been no evidence of roosting bats recorded, or potential for roosting bats identified in relation to the Leisure Centre building and scattered trees, bats should not be directly affected by the proposed works.

Indirect impacts that may affect the local bat population include a net loss of foraging/commuting habitats and increase in artificial lighting associated with the site.

To avoid these indirect impacts, precautionary mitigation measures are recommended in a subsequent section.

4.2.2.2 Breeding Birds

Although no evidence for breeding birds was recorded during the survey, breeding birds could be impacted on by the removal/disturbance of the larger shrubs within the miscellaneous planting, along with the scrub and scattered trees, if this is conducted during the breeding season (March-July/August, as a guide). This is because they represent potentially suitable habitats to support nesting birds.

To avoid the seasonal risk of impacting on breeding birds, precautionary mitigation measures are recommended in a subsequent section.

4.2.2.3 Reptiles

Although the site contains potentially suitable reptile habitats, i.e. grassland/scrub, they represent a small fragment of semi-natural habitat isolated from other such habitats by roads, residential and commercial properties, as illustrated in the aerial photographs provided in Appendix 1. It is considered unlikely that reptiles are present within the site and therefore the proposed works should not impact on reptiles.

4.3 Legislation and Policy

4.3.1 Bats

All species of bat native to the UK and their habitats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CROW Act 2000) and by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, which consolidates all the various amendments made to the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 in respect of England and Wales. The 1994 Regulations transposed Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (EC Habitats Directive) into national law.

The legislation makes it illegal under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) to:

- Intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a wild bat;
- Be in possession or control of any live or dead wild bat or any part of, or anything derived from a wild bat;
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a wild bat uses for shelter or protection; and
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild bat while it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection.

All species of bat native to the UK are European Protected Species (EPS). As such under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, it is an offence to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill any wild animal of a European Protected Species;
- Deliberately disturb wild animals of any such species. Disturbance of animals includes in particular any disturbance which is likely to:
 - impair their ability -
 - to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young; or
 - in the case of animals of a hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate; or
 - to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong;
- Deliberately take or destroy the eggs of such an animal; or
- Deliberately damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal.

4.3.2 Breeding Birds

Breeding birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) which makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take any wild bird or take, damage or destroy its nest whilst it is in use or being built, or to take or destroy its eggs. In addition, some species of bird are listed under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), for which there are additional offences of disturbing these birds at their nests, or their dependent young.

4.3.3 Reptiles

All species of reptile native to the UK are afforded legal protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) in respect of deliberate, intentional or reckless killing and injuring. Protection to the habitats of reptiles is only extended to smooth snake (*Coronella austriaca*) and sand lizard (*Lacerta agilis*), which have specialist habitat requirements not supported by the site.

4.3.4 National Planning Policy Framework

The Government published the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 27th March 2012, which replaced previous policy documents, including Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9): Biodiversity and Geological Conservation.

The NPPF states that, “the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;
- Recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services;
- Minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity, where possible contributing to the Government’s commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- Preventing both new and existing development from contributing to or being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability; and
- Remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.”

The NPPF (Section 117) indicates that LPAs should take measures to “promote the preservation, restoration and re-creation of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species” linking to national and local targets through local planning policies.

Priority species are those species shown on the England Biodiversity List published by the Secretary of State under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. LPAs have a duty under Section 40 of the NERC Act to have regard to priority species and habitats in exercising their functions including development control and planning.

In addition, the NPPF (Section 118) states that when determining planning applications, LPAs should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by encouraging opportunities to be taken for the incorporation of biodiversity in and around developments.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Mitigation Measures

5.1.1 Habitats

It is recommended that impacts to retained trees be avoided, in accordance with British Standard (BS) 5837:2012 "Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction - Recommendations". This is to ensure that no damage to stems or roots, no soil compaction by vehicles, no contamination of soil from spillages, no scorching from fires, or instability/stress from changes in soil levels shall take place. To offset the overall loss of habitats as a result of the proposed works, enhancement measures are recommended in a subsequent section.

5.1.2 Bats

Since there is no perceived risk of direct impacts to roosting bats as a result of the proposed works, specific mitigation measures in relation to extension of the Leisure Centre/removal of trees are not considered necessary. However, to ensure that there is no long-term net loss of potentially suitable foraging and commuting habitats, enhancement measures are recommended in a subsequent section. In addition, any new artificial lighting should avoid illuminating the tree-lined boundary adjacent to the Hambledon Road boundary.

5.1.3 Breeding Birds

The disturbance or removal of potential breeding bird habitat should ideally be undertaken outside of the bird breeding season (avoiding March-July/August as a guide). If it is necessary to conduct these works during the breeding season, the habitats will need to be checked in advance for the presence/absence of any birds' nests. If any active nests are found then works with the potential to impact on the nest must cease and an appropriate buffer zone should be established until the young have fledged and the nest is no longer in use.

5.1.4 Reptiles

Since there is no perceived risk of impacts to reptiles as a result of the proposed works, mitigation measures are not considered necessary. However, if at any time it becomes apparent that reptiles are present and at risk of impacts, an experienced ecologist should immediately be contacted and consulted about how to progress without the risk of causing an offence.

5.2 Enhancement Measures

It is recommended that ecological enhancement measures be implemented for the site, to include new planting of native species and non-native species that are known to benefit wildlife. In particular, this should focus on offsetting the loss of shrubs, scrub and trees via replacement. Any timber resulting from the removal of trees should be relocated in piles to the site margins, for use by sheltering/hibernating wildlife.

Schwegler bat boxes and bird boxes should also be installed on suitably sized retained trees within the overall site. Bat boxes should be installed above at least five metres and on a variety of orientations. Bird boxes should be installed above at least three metres and not positioned facing due south, to avoid over-heating during the summer. The use of aluminium nails is recommended, to avoid unnecessary damage to trees.

These general recommendations are made because when considering development proposals, LPAs are directed by the NPPF (Section 4.3.4) to ensure that opportunities for ecological enhancement are being taken to promote a positive gain for biodiversity.

6 Conclusions

To inform a planning application, GreenLink Ecology Ltd. was commissioned to conduct an ecological scoping survey for the site.

The survey that was undertaken on 5th December 2013 determined that the plants within the site are not protected or notable species and they do not constitute habitats of conservation concern. Since the habitat types within the site are common and widespread, the impact of the proposed works on habitats is considered insignificant and mitigation measures are only recommended in relation to retained trees.

During the survey, an assessment of the site's potential to support legally protected/notable species was made, with bats, breeding birds and reptiles being considered.

Since no evidence was recorded, or significant potential for roosting bats was identified in relation to the existing building and trees, the proposed works should not directly impact on bats. Mitigation measures are therefore only considered necessary for bats on a precautionary basis, to prevent the net loss of foraging/commuting opportunities and to avoid new artificial lighting illuminating such existing habitats.

Since there are habitats present that are potentially suitable for use by breeding birds during the March-July/August period, mitigation measures have been recommended to avoid seasonal impacts to breeding birds.

Since it is unlikely that reptiles are present within the site and at risk of impacts, mitigation measures are not considered necessary for reptiles, unless at any time during the proposed works it becomes apparent that reptiles are actually present.

In accordance with the NPPF, enhancement measures have also been recommended to ensure that the development benefits local biodiversity.

Overall, there are no known overriding ecological constraints that would prevent the proposed works going ahead, subject to the recommendations made in this report being correctly implemented.

7 Disclaimer

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Any recommendation, opinion or finding stated in this report is based on circumstances and facts as they existed at the time that GreenLink Ecology Ltd. performed the work.

Nothing in this report constitutes legal opinion. If legal opinion is required the advice of a qualified legal professional should be secured.

8 Appendices

Appendix 1: Illustrating the approximate site location and the surrounding area

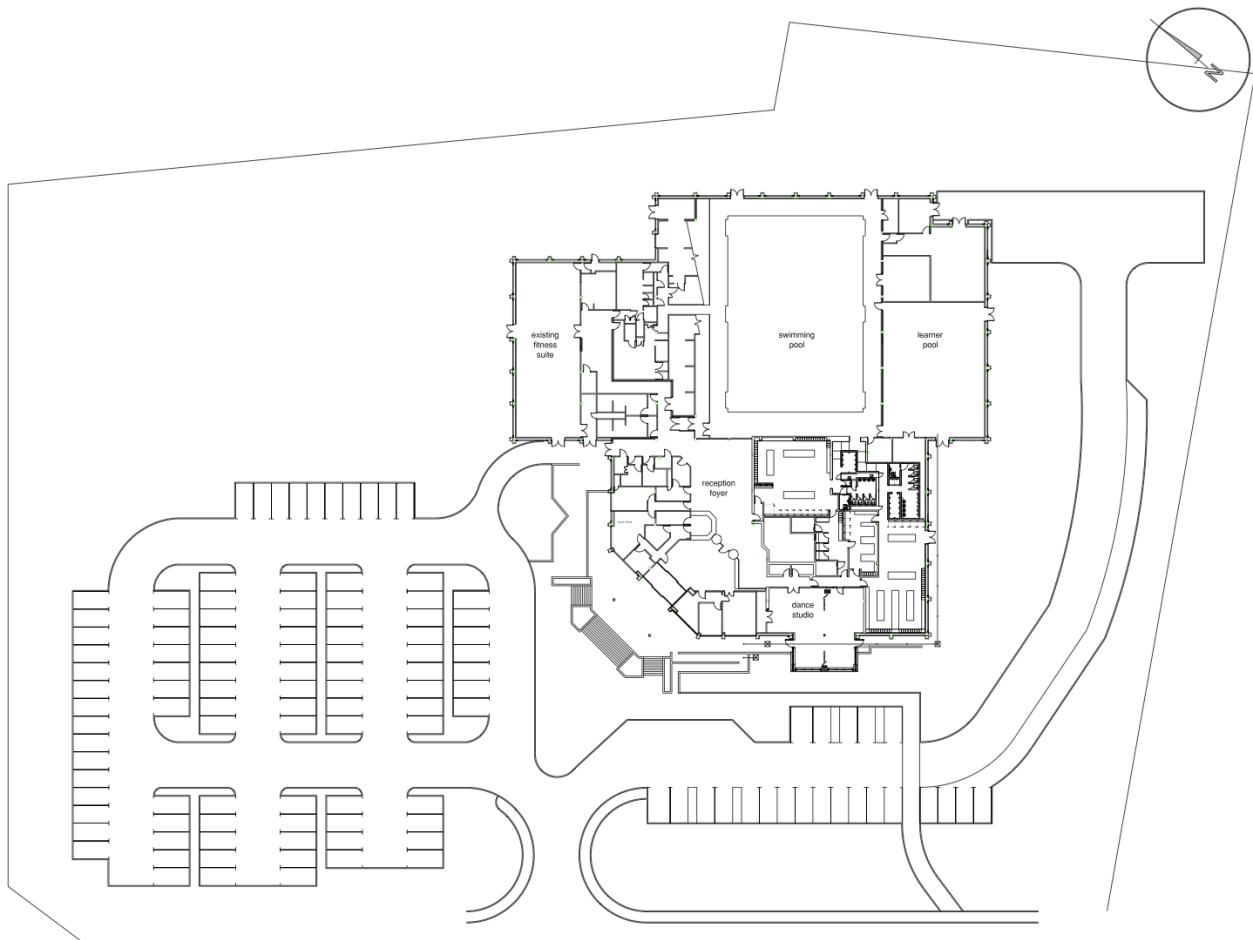
Photograph 1: The site and immediate surrounding area



Photograph 2: The site and wider surrounding area



Appendix 2: Existing site plan



Appendix 3: Photographs of the site

Photograph 1: Proposed new car parking area, to the south of the site



Photograph 2: Proposed works area, to the north-east of the existing building



Photograph 3: Proposed works area, to the north of the existing building



Appendix 4: Proposed site plan

